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# The Work Ethic: What are we Mesuring? L'évaluation de l'éthique du travail

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### Résumé de l'article

Cette étude porte sur les changements qui se sont produits dans les sociétés modernes en ce qui concerne l'éthique du travail. Le concept d'éthique du travail consiste dans la réunion de quatre composantes : 1° le désir de travailler ou la propension au travail; 2° le travail considéré en tant que centre d'intérêt de la vie; 3° l'application, la responsabilité, la discipline et autres qualités personnelles; 4° la perception du travail considéré comme une obligation sociale plutôt qu'un choix personnel.

L'auteur, à partir des idées exposées à ce sujet par le grand sociologue allemand, Max Weber, dans son ouvrage sur l'éthique protestante du travail et l'esprit du capitalisme, fait une revue des enquêtes et des recherches qui ont été effectuées sur le sujet au cours des vingt dernières années.

Pourquoi ce renouveau d'intérêt? Pour quatre raisons: la coexistence de taux élevés de chômage avec un manque de main-d'œuvre, d'où l'on a déduit que certains groupes sociaux auraient fui le travail; les niveaux élevés de virement de la main-d'œuvre et d'absentéisme qu'on a relevés, en particulier dans l'industrie de l'automobile aux États-Unis; le grand nombre de « lâcheurs »; enfin la diminution de la qualité du travail, le manque de motivation et le refus des responsabilités notés par nombre d'employeurs.

Les observateurs de la vie sociale attribuent ce comportement et ces attitudes à diverses causes: la prédominance d'une société hédoniste, le « carpe diem » des Romains, les effets de la production de masse et de la bureaucratisation qui ont rendu abstraite la notion de travail, l'existence d'une société d'abondance superindustrialisée, l'existence de sources de revenu autres que le travail, la diminution marquée du nombre des agriculteurs, des petits propriétaires et des artisans. Ce qui s'est produit depuis un siècle, c'est une disjonction entre la structure sociale, c'est-à-dire l'économie, la technologie et le système professionnel, et la culture proprement dite.

On a cherché à vérifier les dimensions de ces changements par des enquêtes. L'étude rapporte un certain nombre d'entre elles faites auprès de groupes de travailleurs tant aux États-Unis qu'au Canada et portant sur l'intensité de l'éthique du travail. Ainsi quatre-vingt pour cent (80%) des employés, dans une enquête portant sur 401 individus, répondirent qu'ils continueraient à travailler même s'ils recevaient un héritage leur permettant de vivre confortablement. On demanda à des retraités la raison pour laquelle ils retournaient sur le marché du travail. Les réponses ont démontré que les cols bleus recherchaient de l'emploi pour accroître leurs revenus et les cols blancs pour chasser l'ennui. À d'autres cols bleus, on a demandé si, étant en chômage, ils accepteraient un emploi de laveurs d'automobile et 91 pour cent répondirent par l'affirmative. Une enquête faite parmi les gens instruits à la *General Electric* entre 1964 et 1972 indique que la situation n'a pas beaucoup changé dans l'intervalle, si ce n'est que l'on remarque un certain déclin d'intérêt pour le travail chez les jeunes, mais en même temps les répondants mettent davantage l'accent sur les facteurs de bien-être personnel qu'ils peuvent en retirer. Quand on demande aux Canadiens s'ils préfèrent travailler ou vivre de l'assurance-chômage ou des prestations du bien-être social, quatre-vingt-onze pour cent (91%) répondent par la négative, mais, par ailleurs, moins des tiers accepteraient le premier emploi venu, soixante pour cent (60%) ne ressentent aucun sentiment de culpabilité à toucher les prestations de l'assurance-chômage, plus de soixante pour cent (60%) estiment qu'une personne ne devrait pas travailler pour le salaire minimal.

De l'ensemble de ces études et de ces enquêtes, il ressort que la grande majorité de la population reconnaît la valeur du travail quoique celle-ci soit quelque peu à la baisse chez les jeunes. Toutefois, lorsque les questions sont posées d'une façon indirecte et qu'elles sont centrées sur les aspects structurels du comportement humain, il est apparent que le consensus est beaucoup moins prononcé. Le refus de travailler aux tarifs du salaire minimal, le désir de n'accepter que l'emploi de son choix, la tentation de comparer le travail aux avantages personnels qu'il peut procurer, tout cela montre que le monde est rendu au stade où l'éthique traditionnelle du travail cède le pas à une appréciation plus personnelle fondée sur le concept des coûts-avantages. Il s'agit là d'un processus naturel et inévitable, mais il engendre de sérieuses tensions. Sans entrer dans de longs commentaires historiques, il n'est pas inapproprié de rappeler les tentatives de Durkheim en vue de concilier, selon sa théorie, le conflit entre les besoins sociaux et les préférences individuelles en recourant au concept de la « solidarité organique », comme l'expression de l'accord mutuel et d'une liaison fonctionnelle entre l'individu et la société. Au bout d'une longue période et après des efforts considérables, Durkheim en vint à la conclusion que l'harmonie absolue entre les besoins de la société et ceux des individus est impossible et que la société a besoin d'un bouclier protecteur idéologique, c'est-à-dire des normes universellement acceptées qui en assurent le fonctionnement normal.

Quelques auteurs contemporains sont heureux d'annoncer que l'éthique du travail est vivante et qu'elle se porte bien, parce que les gens ont un désir plus grand qu'autrefois d'accomplir un travail significatif et créateur. Il s'agit là d'une confusion et d'une incompréhension. Le fer de lance de l'éthique du travail consiste dans l'accomplissement d'un travail simple, servile, désagréable et inopportun. Dès le départ, l'éthique du travail était un instrument de contrôle social, un instrument qui aidait à remplir les vides de l'économie là et quand c'était nécessaire. C'est vraiment ce qui manque aujourd'hui. À moins que nous ne puissions mettre au point d'autres méthodes aussi efficaces de motivation au travail, nous n'avons pas à nous réjouir de la régression de l'éthique du travail et nous devons contenir notre emballement de son bon état de santé. La question de l'éthique du travail, pour être bien comprise, doit être étudiée, non en tant que matière d'attitudes verbales mais en tant qu'un problème de liaison structurelle entre les attitudes sociales de la population et les besoins socio-économiques du système. Seule une pareille analyse peut aider à dénouer le dilemme socio-économique de l'éthique du travail dans la société moderne.

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# The Work Ethic: What Are We Measuring?

Jiri Juzanek

*The author questions the traditional criteria of work ethic following profound changes in the scale of values within society.*

Differently than in the study of job satisfaction, analysis of the work ethic focuses upon changing values rather than attitudes.\* The values deal with more general and stable personal and social orientations than the attitudes. When we examine the work values, we address ourselves to the workers' underlying philosophies of work and life and their compliance with societal normative expectations rather than to his situational expectations. A person can be dissatisfied with his work (attitude) because he did not get an anticipated raise, but this need not have any bearing upon his work values (work ethic). The dissatisfaction may be relatively easily removed by a promotion, while the work values change rather slowly.

## WHAT IS THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC?

The discussion of the work values and their change in modern society often centers around the Protestant Work Ethic. Some journalists ask, Is the Protestant Work Ethic dead or dying? Others counter that it is alive and well.

The notion of the Protestant ethic of work was introduced into social sciences by the German sociologist Max Weber in his now famous book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In this book, Weber suggested that modern capitalism was brought to existence not

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\*\* An attitude, according to M. Rokeach, differs from a value in that it refers to a specific object or a situation. A value, on the other hand, has a «*transcendental*» quality to it, guiding actions, attitudes, judgments, and comparisons *across specific objects and situations*, and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate goals» (1973: 17-18).

only by a set of revolutionary technological innovations (as Marx suggested), but also by a particular social spirit or ethos which he identified as the Protestant Ethic of Work. In Weber's views, to make the expansion of modern industrial capitalist societies possible, it was necessary to: change the medieval adverse disposition towards business, achievement and hard work and to replace the traditional «subsistence» values and philosophies with a strong drive aimed towards acquisition, industrial expansion and growth. The key to the achievement of these conditions lay in the development of a new ethic of work. The work was to be valued for its own sake. it became a vocation, a service to God, a calling.

Weber admitted that this religious attitude combined with strong elements of ascetism did not last too long. Once the modern society was established and well entrenched, the economical necessity, habit, structure of opportunities, etc. would take over the function of this 'work religion' and the religious connotations of work ethic would diminish. At the end of his book Weber concluded that «when ascetism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it became a part of the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which determine the lives of the individuals... with irresistible force». Victorious capitalism no longer needed the support of the religious beliefs, and the work ethic became an accepted way of life, strive for wealth and security, sport. «Today,» Weber wrote, «any relationship between religious beliefs and the ethic of work is generally absent, and where any exists, at least in Germany, it tends to be of the negative sort» (1958: 70).

#### THE WORK ETHIC: IT'S COMPONENTS AND SOCIAL FUNCTION

Contemporary authors usually associate the work ethic with some definite orientations toward work. Among the many attributes of work ethic, the following ones are most often mentioned: thrift, hard work, capacity for deferred gratifications (*Work in America*, 1973: 10), industriousness and work discipline (Wollack, 1971: 139), desire to work (*Canadian Work Values*, 1974: 11), success ethic (Morrison, 1971: 67), competitive spirit, self-reliance, belief in the virtuousness of work, and centrality of work in the human life (Dubin, 1963). This list could be easily expanded, but this would probably add little to the general perception of the problem.

Three dominant interpretations are implicit in most of the definitions. One tends to present the work ethic as a predominantly socio-

psychological problem, i.e. that of the willingness or desire to work. It is often coupled with an emphasis upon the ability of a person to defer immediate gratifications in favour of a final appreciation of the end results of work and its accomplishments. The second approach emphasizes the centrality of work in the human life, i.e. the degree to which a person is willing to identify work as his central life interest. And finally, the third approach focuses upon a person's conformity with certain expectations about job performance, i.e. thriftiness, honest effort, industriousness, responsibility, work discipline, etc.

All three of these approaches refer to some important aspects of the work ethic, being complementary rather than exclusive by nature. But they are not exhaustive of the notion of work ethic in our opinion.

It has been suggested by numerous authors (de Grazia, Bell) that the desire to work may have never been shared by the majority of the population, and with the possible exception of the very beginning of the Protestant Ethic of Work (i.e. with the New England Puritans) it was probably paid lip service, rather than concretely professed. S. Levitan and W. Johnston, commenting upon this problem, wrote that, «It is not clear whether the moralists' praise of work was ever accepted by the working men or how much it actually motivated work» (S. Levitan and W. Johnston, 1973: 31). As for the centrality of work in human life, this concept probably applied to selected occupational groups (proprietors in the past; professionals and managers, today) rather than to the total population which has taken a more instrumental approach toward work. Finally, the attributes of industriousness, thriftiness, hard work, discipline, etc., important as they are for the whole concept of work ethic, focus on the individual's performance, and do not tell us much about the underlying social function of the work ethic. It is this latter aspect that we would like to elaborate upon.

Weber's views are probably most helpful in the understanding of the *social* function of the work ethic. In his analysis of the Protestant Ethic of Work, Weber implied that the ethic of work was a self-imposed willingness of the individual to identify and conform with the goals of the society and to volunteer his services to an abstract idea of the industrial effort, growth, and acquisition. The Work Ethic in this particular sense, was the opposite of job satisfaction. Work was to be done for no obvious reason, but rather for its own value. It was an «irrational attitude,» as Weber many times repeated.

This irrationality served, however, some very real social purpose. The society which was either not able to satisfy everybody's needs

adequately (scarcity of resources) or not willing to do so (the class system) needed, in addition to the negative enforcements of penalties, a strong positive impetus, i.e. a concept of duty or an ethic of work which would motivate the person to seek the work. The role of this self-motivating ethic was particularly strong in the «frontier» situation when there was no controls other than a person's dedication to work values (Riesman's inner-directedness). The prosperity of the society under these conditions was very much dependent on the willingness of the person to take the risks and pains of uncertain endeavours, without a clear knowledge of the cost-benefit trade-off.

The social function of the work ethic could probably be well illustrated by its subsequent developments in countries such as contemporary Russia or China. Those who travelled through the U.S.S.R. of late have probably seen on many occasions billboards with the slogan, «Work is a matter of courage honour and heroism.» The ethic of work, i.e. the total and absolute, almost religious commitment to the values of work, is strongly enforced by the schools and by the literature and the mass media, etc. Again, similarly to the situation of the early capitalism, the latent function of this work ethic is apparent. In a society, which is not able to reward adequately its members for the work effort, or chooses other priorities, the cost-benefit method has to be supplemented by a strong ideological commitment to work. This commitment must motivate and force workers to take jobs, where the society deems it necessary, irrespective of the individual's satisfaction or preference.

To summarize the above discussion briefly, we would like to state that the work ethic could be defined and analyzed as a combination of at least four major factors: (i) the desire or propensity to work; (ii) The centrality of work in one's life career; (iii) The industriousness, responsibility, work discipline and other personal qualities; and (iv) The perception of work as a social obligation toward the society and fellow men, rather than a personal choice only. In our further analysis of the work ethic we will pay attention to all of these four major aspects.

#### **CONTEMPORARY CONCERN FOR THE WORK ETHIC: ITS DETERMINANTS AND MANIFESTATIONS**

Concern for the work ethic seems to have been growing in western societies since the mid-1960's. The causes of this concern were manifold and they included: (i) the coexistence of high unemployment rates with labour shortages which led many observers into a belief that some groups shun away from work; (ii) high rates of work turnover and of

absenteeism (it was reported that in some U.S. automobile factories absenteeism on Fridays and Mondays reaches 15-20 percent); (iii) large numbers of dropouts from the society (according to the *Time* magazine there were not fewer than 20,000 dropouts in the United States per year in the late 1960's); (iv) finally, many employers complained about the lowering of the quality of work and skill among workers, lack of achievement motivation, reluctance to accept responsibility, etc. Here are a few illustrations of these concerns:

In urging his colleagues to undertake a study of the work ethic, Senator David Croll from Ontario stated, «In 1969 we imported 2,363 Americans, Mexicans and West Indians to pick tomatoes and tobacco, and by 1973 the number has risen to 5,000. Are Canadians too lazy to do the Work?» The *Canadian Work Values* study commissioned by the Department of Manpower and Immigration tested, among other, the dictum that young Canadians were not willing to take existing jobs because they preferred unemployment insurance and idleness to work (1974: 7).

Prime Minister Trudeau, addressing this problem, posed in a somewhat subtler manner this same question, «There is perhaps a different work ethic emerging in our society,» he said. «Perhaps there is a growing percentage of people, though I'm sure it's still very small, who don't want to continue looking to work in the traditional sense in order to fulfill themselves as humans» (1972: 9).

How real are these concerns? What are their causes? and What is the potential direction of change in the work values? First, let us look under the surface of the general rhetoric concerning the Work Ethic and consider some of the economic and social determinants of what appears to be a change in work values.

The underlying causes of these changes have been examined and commented upon by numerous authors. The following text summarizes some of their major observations.

According to Daniel Bell, the decline of the work ethic was produced by the continued effect of those same factors which originally brought it to life, i.e. the commitment to the gospel of continuous economic growth. «Through mass production,» he wrote, «capitalism destroyed the Protestant ethic. By the middle of the twentieth century capitalism sought to justify itself, not by work or property, but by the status badges of material possessions, the promotion of pleasure, and a zealous promotion of a 'hedonistic way of life'» (1973: 477). The result, according to Bell has created a disjunction within the social structure. In the organiza-

tion of production and work, the system demands provident behavior, industriousness, self-control, and a dedication to a career and to success. In the realm of consumption, it fosters the attitude of CARPE DIEM, prodigality and display, and the compulsive search for play.

Other authors argued that in a society characterized by mass production and large scale bureaucratization, work became «abstract,» and it is rather difficult to develop any personal relationship or attachment to it.

«Where work is concerned with wresting food from the earth, creating warmth and shelter for one's family, or even where, in societies undergoing industrialization, it is ideologically envisioned as the collective creation of a bright future (as it is today, for example, in the USSR and China), Protestant ethics have been eminently qualified to confer on such activities profound moral content. But where work is concerned with the manufacture of hoola hoops or mink coats for dogs or refrigerators that never need defrosting or automobiles that almost never need lubrication, and where men trained in English language and literature devote their worklives to the skillful use of the incomplete comparison in order to sell goods, even so versatile an instrument as our traditional value system learns its limitations» (Berger, 1963: 31).

Another explanation for the supposed decline of the work ethic is its economic «redundance» in a superindustrial and affluent society. This argument suggests that economy of scale and automation are able to effectively replace large numbers of workers by automated machinery and small numbers of highly efficient specialists. Under these conditions the need for hard work or almost any work declines. Automation makes the work ethic outmoded for the majority of the population, although it is still needed for a minority. According to this concept in an increasingly affluent society the person may regard his job as a discretionary rather than a compulsory activity. «Where work was once almost entirely determined by accidents of birth and the requirements of society, it is now more likely to be an expression of personal choice. Where work was once an inevitable duty from 'sunup to sundown,' it has become an activity among many, pursued partly at the discretion of the individual» (S. Levitan and W. Johnston, 1973: 21). «As the crucial urgency of economic allocations eases, individuals will more and more be able to choose the activities in which they will engage. In such a society, work and leisure may begin to lose their definitional opposition» (*Ibid*: 23).

According to some other authors, part of the reason for what is sometimes referred to as the crisis of work ethic, lies in the fact that

under the conditions of growing affluence and social security we are running out of effective motivational stimuli for work. The carrot of wages and the stick of the threat of being fired have lost much of their power in a society where finding a new job or obtaining generous social support is relatively easy. According to P. Drucker, when economic incentives have been institutionalized as rights rather than rewards there is less space for the ethic of work.

The *Canadian Work Values* survey, for one, has argued that the traditional work attitudes have been modified by a non-work income which seems likely to offer some competition for the society's lowest paid jobs. This conclusion, it appears, is supported by the latest report of Canada's Economic Council which sees the relative «generosity» of the Canadian unemployment schemes as a disincentive to work.

Finally, it is suggested that part of the reason for the decline of the traditional work ethic, is the decline in the proportions of those groups which traditionally were its staunchest bearers and supporters, i.e. farmers, small proprietors, self-employed, etc.

In summarizing the above statements, we can conclude that a combination of economic factors (growth of consumption, less need of work), technological and organizational factors (automation), social factors (security, affluence, installment credit, welfare schemes) and, finally, stratification trends (i.e. decline of the self-employed groups) may have all contributed to a changing objective situation of the work and work values in modern industrial societies.

These professed structural changes have resulted, according to some authors, in a clearly distinguishable set of cultural (symbolic) conflicts. According to B. Berger, one of the major problems of modern society is the conflict between its social structure and its culture. Our value system, B. Berger states, is unable to confer honor on typical situations which the social system engenders. «Our social system needs and produces 'organization men', but the words remain offensive to us; we are all status seekers, but nobody defends status seeking. Our value system does not provide us with the moral vocabulary to defend much of the behavior and many of the roles which the social structure requires» (1963: 32).

Daniel Bell in *The Coming of Postindustrial Society* referred to this conflict as a widening gap between the social system and the culture in modern industrial societies: «What has been happening in Western society for the past hundred years,» he wrote, «is a widening disjunction between the social structure (the economy, technology, and occupa-



tional system) and the culture (the symbolic expression of meanings), each of which is ruled by a different axial principle. The social structure is rooted in functional rationality and efficiency, the culture in the antinomian justification of the enhancement of the self» (1973: 47).

We will comment upon some of the ideological manifestations of this conflict at a later point.

#### **DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE: SOME EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

Now that we have examined some of the determinants and manifestations of the changes in the work values, let us briefly examine how extensively these suggested changes have occurred, how large groups of the society they affected, and how deep they go.

These questions have been raised in a number of recent surveys, though we would only like to mention here a few, namely: Goldstein's and Eichhorn's study «The Changing Protestant Ethic: Rural Patterns in Health, Work and Leisure» (1961); Morse and Weiss' study, «The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job» (1962); Loether's, «The Meaning of Work and Adjustment to Retirement» (1964); the NORC survey of bluecollar work orientations in 1967; T. Jakubowski's study of work orientations of the white-collar workers; the study of the «Changes in the Work Ethic,» conducted by General Electric in 1964, and repeated in 1972; the 1973-1974 survey of the «Canadian Work Values»; and finally, the Yankelovich studies of the changing value orientations of U.S. college and non-college youth between 1969 and 1973.

What do all these studies suggest with respect to the state of the work ethic in Canada and in the U.S.? According to the Goldstein-Eichhorn study of American farmers, 27 percent of their sample scored high on the Work Ethic score, 51 percent scored medium and about 21 percent scored low; the work ethic was measured essentially by the assignment of importance to hard work.

Morse and Weiss asked their random sample of 401 employed men, whether they would work if they inherited enough money to live comfortably. Eighty percent of the respondents answered that they would. They listed numerous positive (pride of work) and negative reasons (would feel lost without work, etc.) in support of their feeling that they would work.

Loether, in a study of Los Angeles retirees, asked his respondents about the reasons why some of them returned to occasional work, and

the more general question whether or not it was important for a man to work. The responses indicated that blue-collar workers returned to work mainly for additional income, while the white-collar workers returned to get relief from boredom. As for the importance of work and the reasons for it: 61 percent quoted negative reasons (keeping out of trouble, boredom, etc.); 25 percent named positive values (work gives a purpose, you contribute to the world, etc.); and about 3 percent quoted traditional religious reasons, i.e. the Protestant ethic — «It's a rule of life — ordained by God.» Finally, about 11 percent placed no value on work and considered it to be only an instrumental necessity.

The NORC study of 1967 asked blue-collar respondents such questions as: «If you were out of work, which would you rather do? Go on welfare or take a job of a carwasher that paid the same as welfare?» Ninety-one percent said they would take the job as a carwasher. When asked the question whether they would retire or work anyway if they had enough money, 81 percent of the respondents declared that they would work anyway. The survey by Jakubowski with white-collar employees from that same year, produced essentially similar results, with even more respondents, i.e. 89 percent determined to work, in case of sufficient money supply.

The General Electric study, although entitled, «Changes in Work Ethic,» focused more upon problems concerning job satisfaction and the «central life interest» than those of work ethic or work values. It indicated, however, that between 1964 and 1972 the values of college educated men, 22-28 years of age, did not show too radical a change in terms of dissociation from traditional values. In fact, the 1972 responses indicated a slight decline of interest in work in large industrial concerns, but growing interest in starting one's own business. It also indicated a more instrumental approach to work. A heavier emphasis was placed upon the welfare components such as better salary and working hours, but particularly more emphasis was placed on such factors as, «living in the city or place you like,» or «having a great deal of time to spend with one's family,» while downgrading (as compared to 1964) the role of education, the chance to exercise leadership, and interesting work. It is somewhat difficult to interpret these results, in view of a different formulation of the questions than in most other surveys.

The Canadian Survey of Work Values addressed itself to the traditional work ethic problems, using some of the types of questions asked in the earlier surveys, but supplementing them with other, less direct approaches. The survey in general suggested that Canadians prefer working to being on unemployment insurance. Ninety-seven

percent of the surveyed sample disagreed with the statement, «There are plenty jobs that are available, but I would rather collect unemployment insurance than work.» Ninety-five percent disagreed with the statement, «I would like to work a little while, and then get by on unemployment insurance.» Approximately 70 percent viewed work as a personal choice rather than just an economic necessity.

However, this same survey has shown that fewer than one-third of the respondents agreed that they are *not* choosy about the jobs they take. Sixty percent replied that they would not feel guilty about collecting unemployment insurance, and 46 percent agreed that minimum wage is beneath a person's dignity (especially white-collar workers). Even more, 61 percent thought that a person should not have to work for a minimum wage, and 52 percent would not work for less than \$.350 an hour, in 1973. In terms of their sense of commitment, Canadians placed their families first, work second, and friends third.

A similar, somewhat ambiguous situation was revealed by the surveys conducted by Yankelovich among U.S. college and non-college youth. It included, among others, questions about the respondent's attitudes toward work. His study revealed that 89 percent of non-college youth felt that doing any job well is important (1973), and 79 percent felt that commitment to a meaningful career is a very important part of a person's life. Seventy-five percent of them believed it was morally wrong to collect welfare when you can work, but only: 53 percent considered work an important personal value; 56 percent thought that hard work will pay off; and as much as 35 percent would welcome less emphasis on working hard (as compared to 32 percent in 1969). Among sources of life satisfaction, jobs ended far behind family (38%), personal relations with friends, and interest outside the job (26%), with only 4 percent of blue-collar workers listing it as a source of satisfaction.

How can we summarize the above discussion? It appears from the empirical surveys that verbal commitments to work values are running high, and that overall, a commitment to the work ethic is probably shared by a very decisive majority of the population, with somewhat lower figures among the youth. However, if the questions were formulated in a more indirect way and focused upon the structural aspects of human behavior, it appeared that there was far less consensus with respect to this problem. Unwillingness to take jobs for minimal pay, a high element of choosiness, attempts to weight commitment toward a job against other rewards and trade-offs — all indicate that we probably entered the stage where traditional ethic of work is giving way to a more personal cost-benefit approach to work. This

process is probably both inevitable and natural, but it also creates some serious tensions. This is not a place for lengthy historical commentaries but one may be reminded of E. Durkheim's attempts to reconcile in his theory the conflict between societal needs and individual preferences by using the concept of «organic solidarity» as an expression of the mutual agreement and functional match between the individual and the society. After a rather long period of time and considerable effort, Durkheim came to the conclusion that absolute harmony of social and individual needs is impossible and that the society needs a protective shield of «ideological,» i.e. non-negotiable, universally accepted norms for its normal functioning.

Some authors of today are happy to announce that the work ethic is alive and well, because people have a stronger than before desire for meaningful and creative work. This is, of course, a confusion and a misunderstanding. The thrust of the work ethic was that the non-creative, menial, unpleasant, untimely work had to be done. The work ethic was from the very beginnings an instrument of social control, an instrument which helped to fill the loopholes of the economy whenever and wherever needed. This is exactly what appears to be missing today. Unless we will be able to produce other equally efficient methods of work motivation, which is somewhat unlikely in the opinion of this author, we may reserve our joy about the death of the work ethic as well as curb our enthusiasm about its presumed health. The question of the work ethic, to be understood, has to be studied, not as a matter of verbal attitudes but as the problem of the structural match between social attitudes of the population and the socio-economic «needs» of the system. Only such an analysis will help us grasp the socio-economic dilemma of the work ethic in modern society.

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## L'évaluation de l'éthique du travail

Cette étude porte sur les changements qui se sont produits dans les sociétés modernes en ce qui concerne l'éthique du travail. Le concept d'éthique du travail consiste dans la réunion de quatre composantes: 1° le désir de travailler ou la propension au travail; 2° le travail considéré en tant que centre d'intérêt de la vie; 3° l'application, la responsabilité, la discipline et autres qualités personnelles; 4° la perception du travail considéré comme une obligation sociale plutôt qu'un choix personnel.

L'auteur, à partir des idées exposées à ce sujet par le grand sociologue allemand, Max Weber, dans son ouvrage sur l'éthique protestante du travail et l'esprit du capitalisme, fait une revue des enquêtes et des recherches qui ont été effectuées sur le sujet au cours des vingt dernières années.

Pourquoi ce renouveau d'intérêt? Pour quatre raisons: la coexistence de taux élevés de chômage avec un manque de main-d'œuvre, d'où l'on a déduit que certains groupes sociaux auraient fui le travail; les niveaux élevés de virement de la main-d'œuvre et d'absentéisme qu'on a relevés, en particulier dans l'industrie de l'automobile aux États-Unis; le grand nombre de «lâcheurs»; enfin la diminution de la qualité du travail, le manque de motivation et le refus des responsabilités notés par nombre d'employeurs.

Les observateurs de la vie sociale attribuent ce comportement et ces attitudes à diverses causes: la prédominance d'une société hédoniste, le «carpe diem» des Romains, les effets de la production de masse et de la bureaucratisation qui ont rendu abstraite la notion de travail, l'existence d'une société d'abondance superindustrialisée, l'existence de sources de revenu autres que le travail, la diminution marquée du nombre des agriculteurs, des petits propriétaires et des artisans. Ce qui s'est produit depuis un siècle, c'est une disjonction entre la structure sociale, c'est-à-dire l'économie, la technologie et le système professionnel, et la culture proprement dite.

On a cherché à vérifier les dimensions de ces changements par des enquêtes. L'étude rapporte un certain nombre d'entre elles faites auprès de groupes de travailleurs tant aux États-Unis qu'au Canada et portant sur l'intensité de l'éthique du travail. Ainsi quatre-vingt pour cent (80%) des employés, dans une enquête portant sur 401 individus, répondirent qu'ils continueraient à travailler même s'ils recevaient un héritage leur permettant de vivre confortablement. On demanda à des retraités la raison pour laquelle ils retournaient sur le marché du travail. Les réponses ont démontré que les cols bleus recherchaient de l'emploi pour accroître leurs revenus et les cols blancs pour chasser l'ennui. À d'autres cols bleus, on a demandé si, étant en chômage, ils accepteraient un emploi de laveurs d'automobile et 91 pour cent répondirent par l'affirmative. Une enquête faite parmi les gens instruits à la *General Electric* entre 1964 et 1972 indique que la situation n'a pas beaucoup changé dans l'intervalle, si ce n'est que l'on remarque un certain déclin d'intérêt pour le travail chez les jeunes, mais en même temps les répondants mettent davantage l'accent sur les facteurs de bien-être personnel qu'ils peuvent en retirer. Quand on demande aux Canadiens s'ils préfèrent travailler ou vivre de l'assurance-chômage ou des prestations du bien-être social, quatre-vingt-onze pour cent (91%) répondent par la négative, mais, par ailleurs, moins du tiers accepteraient le premier emploi venu, soixante pour cent (60%) ne ressentent aucun sentiment de culpabilité à toucher les prestations de l'assurance-chômage, plus de soixante pour cent (60%) estiment qu'une personne ne devrait pas travailler pour le salaire minimal.

De l'ensemble de ces études et de ces enquêtes, il ressort que la grande majorité de la population reconnaît la valeur du travail quoique celle-ci soit quelque peu à la baisse chez les jeunes. Toutefois, lorsque les questions sont posées d'une façon indirecte et qu'elles sont centrées sur les aspects structurels du comportement humain, il est apparent que le consensus est beaucoup moins prononcé. Le refus de travailler aux tarifs du salaire minimal, le désir de n'accepter que l'emploi de son choix, la tentation de comparer le travail aux avantages personnels qu'il peut procurer, tout cela montre que le monde est rendu au stade où l'éthique traditionnelle du travail cède le pas à une appréciation plus personnelle fondée sur le concept des coûts-avantages. Il s'agit là d'un processus

naturel et inévitable, mais il engendre de sérieuses tensions. Sans entrer dans de longs commentaires historiques, il n'est pas inapproprié de rappeler les tentatives de Durkheim en vue de concilier, selon sa théorie, le conflit entre les besoins sociaux et les préférences individuelles en recourant au concept de la «solidarité organique», comme l'expression de l'accord mutuel et d'une liaison fonctionnelle entre l'individu et la société. Au bout d'une longue période et après des efforts considérables, Durkheim en vint à la conclusion que l'harmonie absolue entre les besoins de la société et ceux des individus est impossible et que la société a besoin d'un bouclier protecteur idéologique, c'est-à-dire des normes universellement acceptées qui en assurent le fonctionnement normal.

Quelques auteurs contemporains sont heureux d'annoncer que l'éthique du travail est vivante et qu'elle se porte bien, parce que les gens ont un désir plus grand qu'autrefois d'accomplir un travail significatif et créateur. Il s'agit là d'une confusion et d'une incompréhension. Le fer de lance de l'éthique du travail consiste dans l'accomplissement d'un travail simple, servile, désagréable et inopportun. Dès le départ, l'éthique du travail était un instrument de contrôle social, un instrument qui aidait à remplir les vides de l'économie là et quand c'était nécessaire. C'est vraiment ce qui manque aujourd'hui. À moins que nous ne puissions mettre au point d'autres méthodes aussi efficaces de motivation au travail, nous n'avons pas à nous rejouir de la régression de l'éthique du travail et nous devons contenir notre emballement de son bon état de santé. La question de l'éthique du travail, pour être bien comprise, doit être étudiée, non en tant que matière d'attitudes verbales mais en tant qu'un problème de liaison structurale entre les attitudes sociales de la population et les besoins socio-économiques du système. Seule une pareille analyse peut aider à dénouer le dilemme socio-économique de l'éthique du travail dans la société moderne.

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